

ketamine in a shipment of furniture from France coming in because of the cartels.

In the first week of September, CBP officers in Texas seized two separate stashes of cocaine with a combined street value of almost \$300,000. In the month of July alone, cocaine seizures increased 91 percent, and meth seizures increased 20 percent. Why are they doing this? They know that the border is open.

On September 8, Texas State Troopers and CBP officers stopped two human smuggling attempts running just hours apart from each other. Our CBP officers have made it standard procedure to scour remote terrain for migrants who have been abandoned and left to die by their cartel transporters. Why is this happening? Because it is obvious to everyone, from the migrants, the cartels to the foreign officials who refuse to police their own borders, that the Biden administration won't do anything to stop it. Tennesseans see this as reckless. It makes no sense.

I talked to some local law enforcement officers this week. They are seeing an uptick in meth, fentanyl, and heroin on the streets—all coming out of Mexico. They repeatedly say: Secure the border.

We live in the greatest Nation on Earth. We are still the world's best example for freedom, and we are the last hope for millions of people suffering under authoritarian rule. It is important to understand that it doesn't have to be the way it has been when you look at this withdrawal from Afghanistan, when you look at this open border, when you look at the fact that, yes, this year, the border patrol has apprehended terrorists at the southern border. That is right. It doesn't have to be that way, but when you have weak leadership—leadership that is not focused, leadership that says “it is my way or the highway”—and when you have that reckless disregard for the truth, that can and will destroy us.

The actions of the Biden administration have already emboldened our enemies. They have made our allies doubt our commitment to them and to the work that they are trying to do to advance freedom for themselves—the work that we are doing to advance freedom here in this country and abroad.

So I would encourage my Democratic colleagues to resist the urge to fall in line with the White House on the issue of the Afghanistan withdrawal and to, instead, join me in demanding as many hearings as it takes to restore accountability and transparency and to find out exactly what happened.

What were our military advisers saying to President Biden? To Vice President HARRIS? To Jake Sullivan? To Susan Rice? To Antony Blinken? What were they telling them? What was the expectation? Did they have a plan? Did they plan to leave Americans behind enemy lines? Did they plan to give up

Bagram Airfield? Did they plan to leave all of the equipment for the Taliban to use? Did they plan on that? Was it intentional that they made those decisions or was it reckless stupidity that got us here?

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

REMEMBERING RICHARD KINKOFF III

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, last weekend, we lost a truly selfless public servant when Richard Kinkoff III, from my office, passed away.

He joined our office as an intern in 2013, and he literally never left. He kept showing up after his internship had ended until we finally had to hire him full time to work with us because he kept showing up every single day. And he kept at it because he wanted to serve. He wanted to serve the people of Florida. That is exactly what Rich did for the past 8 years in leading our team and graciously responding to hundreds of thousands of constituents' inquiries.

I think it is important to note that it is tedious work, but, for him, it was not a formula or an exercise in checking boxes. He was passionate about that kind of work. He took time to listen to the callers who would call. He would read the emails. He sat down and talked to constituents, and then he worked with others on our team to get them answers. He believed in his work. He never let the process take the purpose out of the work that he did or that the team was doing.

Two years ago, his work was recognized when our office received the Democracy Foundation's award for constituent service, an award that we would not have received had he not been part of our team. But for Rich, honestly, it wasn't about recognition; it was about service.

It is no surprise that he took a particular interest in veterans' issues. He treated every constituent case with the respect it deserved, but he had a special passion for making sure our selfless veterans were not left behind or forgotten in the bureaucracy. That is the one word that, I think, keeps coming back as we talk in our office with the staff, and it keeps coming back as we have reflected on his life over the past week—selfless.

Rich had a pickup truck, a big pickup truck, which made him pretty popular with colleagues, with friends, with friends of friends. People need to move, and if you have a truck, you know everybody always wants to borrow it. Rich being Rich, he was always there for them. If your car broke down, Rich was there. If you were an intern in need of career advice, Rich was there. If you needed a ride from the airport, Rich was there. He would even pull himself away from a Tampa Bay Lightning game to lend a helping hand.

Now, look. I have no doubt that Rich would be embarrassed by all of this because it was never about him or for him.

In a letter to the Christian church in Philippi, Paul and Timothy wrote:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves.

Those who knew him can say that Rich answered that call time and again.

And now, for reasons that we cannot explain or know or understand, he has answered a different call, but I do know that we are all better for knowing him, and so are countless others who never knew his name. He was selfless. He was noble. He was a decent man. And as we honor and celebrate his life, let us hope to follow in his example in all that we do here.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, first, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to complete my remarks before the scheduled 5:30 p.m. vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, prior to the August recess, I, along with Senator MURPHY, asked unanimous consent to confirm almost 30—30—highly qualified Foreign Affairs and Development nominees who were languishing on the Senate floor. I noted then the danger of leaving these posts unfilled at a time that we were facing such a confluence of global challenges. Two Republican Senators blocked each one of our requests. Days later, Haiti was hit with a devastating earthquake, and Afghanistan imploded.

While I continue to believe it is essential that this body swiftly confirm every single foreign affairs and development professional whose nomination is pending on the Senate floor, I rise again today to seek unanimous consent to confirm four nominees who are critical to addressing the crisis in Afghanistan and Haiti.

Ambassador Donald Lu, a career Foreign Service Officer, is the President's nominee to serve as Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs.

The last Assistant Secretary for this Bureau was confirmed during the Obama administration. To say that this nomination is long overdue is an understatement, particularly now, given the incredibly dangerous situation in Afghanistan.

Post-withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, the State Department is the main implementer of U.S. policy in the country. And given the regional implications of Afghanistan policy, it is essential that this role be filled with a seasoned and experienced diplomat like Ambassador Lu.

The region is also home to several other countries critical to U.S. interests. From Pakistan to India, to the countries of central Asia, the United States must be present in order to advance those interests and counter the malign influence of both Russia and China.

So I hope that my colleagues will not continue to play games and will support Ambassador Lu's confirmation this evening.

Similarly, it is unthinkable that the State Department's intelligence office, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, or as we know it as INR, remains without senior leadership.

INR is an invaluable resource for the Secretary of State's senior officials and, indeed, all of the dedicated foreign policy professionals who serve our Nation so well and so tirelessly. It needs a confirmed leader in place that can help the Department understand the intelligence information that is out there that helps us instruct, in terms of foreign policy choices. So I am asking my Republican colleagues to permit confirming Brett Holmgren today.

Shifting to Haiti, last month I came to the floor to highlight the challenges that we face in our own hemisphere and the impact of regional instability on U.S. national security and our citizens' safety.

Already, the situation is more urgent than when I raised it. In August, a massive earthquake in Haiti killed more than 2,200 people, injured 12,000 more, destroyed tens of thousands of buildings. A coordinated international response is urgently needed.

This new emergency follows the assassination of Haiti's President and mounting crises in the region, unprecedented protests, and widespread repression in Cuba, a brutal regime crackdown in Nicaragua, and an expansive political and humanitarian refugee crisis in Venezuela.

COVID-19 continues to inflict severe social and economic consequences on countries across the region, and there are the enduring security and governance challenges in Central America that fuel irregular migration.

We need urgently qualified nominees in leadership positions to address these crises.

With an extensive experience in the Americas, Ambassador Brian Nichols, a career Foreign Service Officer, will skillfully advance U.S. national interests as the Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs.

Similarly, Marcela Escobari, who served as Assistant Administrator for Latin America's USAID in the Obama administration, will bring unique expertise to the position if confirmed again today. In 2016, the Senate confirmed her by voice vote—voice vote. We need her in place and should move her again today.

It is scandalous that these nominees and many others are being held up for reasons completely unrelated to them and the positions they will hold. Such irresponsible behavior jeopardizes our national security, and we must act today.

So let me start by asking, first, unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration—Madam President, I will reserve the opportunities to ask for these consents and wait

for one of our colleagues to appear on the floor.

At this time, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, pursuant to the comments I was just making a few minutes ago, let me move directly to my request. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 335, Donald Lu to be Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, and that the Senate vote on the nomination without intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, reserving the right to object, I want to make a few remarks on Senator MENENDEZ's request for unanimous consent on the nomination of Donald Lu to be Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs and also on the nomination of Brett Holmgren to be the Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research.

The reality is that had these nominees been confirmed in August, they would have done nothing to stop the administration's disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan.

President Biden bears responsibility for the catastrophe that has unfolded in Afghanistan. President Biden repeatedly ignored reasonable advice and the intelligence on what was happening on the ground in the runup to the disastrous withdrawal.

He abandoned the Bagram Airfield well before August, setting the stage for the chaos at the Kabul airport. He wasn't even listening to his staff on what needed to be done on Afghanistan.

Instead, he imposed an arbitrary deadline for political purposes, with disastrous results.

I am not going to object to consent on this individual, Mr. Lu, and on Mr. Holmgren, in a moment, that Senator MENENDEZ will ask for, but let's be clear. The administration has tried to play a blame game to deflect blame for their absolute failure to conduct a reasonable and rational drawdown, to deflect blame for President Biden's decision to abandon Bagram to the Taliban, to deflect blame for President Biden's indefensible decision to give the Taliban a list of names of Americans and Afghans who are now very

much in harm's way and in jeopardy because of the foolishness and the manifest incompetence of this administration.

None of the nominees I have holds on would have made one difference in what happened in Afghanistan. And it is difficult to believe that even my Democratic colleagues believe, political talking points notwithstanding, how, for instance, the Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs could have stopped President Biden from gift-wrapping Bagram Airfield and giving it to the Taliban.

It is also important to provide a little bit of background on why these holds are in place in the first place.

President Biden is not following the law. He is refusing to follow the law which mandates the imposition of sanctions on Nord Stream 2. Those sanctions had succeeded, had halted Nord Stream 2 in its place, and President Biden transformed an incredible foreign policy victory into an incredible foreign policy defeat.

When President Biden came into office, he willfully and brazenly disregarded the law, and he allowed Nord Stream 2 to continue on its road to completion, which was, in effect, a multibillion-dollar gift to Vladimir Putin at the expense of Europe's security and at the expense of American national security.

However, there is still time to stop Nord Stream 2 if we act quickly. A pipeline that isn't 100 percent complete is effectively zero percent complete. And I am not going to stop working to halt Nord Stream 2 to stop Russia and to prevent Vladimir Putin from economically blackmailing our European allies and threatening American jobs.

These consents—and, more broadly, what the administration is engaged in—is a blame game trying to distract blame from their own actions. But it is worth noting that I have offered to lift my holds from the beginning. And, indeed, over a month ago, I extended the offer to Treasury Secretary Yellen, to the National Security Advisor in the White House, and to Senator MENENDEZ that I would lift these holds—lift the holds on Treasury nominees and lift the holds on State Department career nominees if the administration either imposed sanctions under CAATSA, the Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, or if they waived those sanctions in such a way that it would trigger Congress having an override vote.

On August 5, I extended that offer directly to Secretary Yellen. Unfortunately, the administration hasn't acted on it. They have decided that their policy of gift-wrapping a multibillion-dollar pipeline for Vladimir Putin and Russia was so important that they wanted to deny Congress even a vote on it under CAATSA.

CAATSA was passed for precisely these circumstances—for an administration that refused to follow U.S. law